

EXHIBIT A

January 22, 2021

Honorable Denise L. Cote
United States District Judge
Daniel Patrick Moynihan United States Courthouse
500 Pearl Street
New York, New York 10007

Dear Judge Cote,

I write this letter with deep remorse and regret for my actions. I constantly relive the decisions that brought me to this, and I cannot believe I allowed myself to commit this crime. It saddens me to think of the hurt I have caused so many, the hurt I have caused my wife, my family, my friends, my community, and the United States of America. I understand that my actions have not only caused harm to me but to many others I have not even met.

Growing up I did not learn financial discipline; I did not learn the value of money or the conflicting consequences. I was raised with a strong trust in family, and authority. Due to my lack of financial discipline, I left rabbinical college in the beginning of 2018 with \$1,500.00 of credit card debt, which to me was the scariest thing I could imagine. I had worked hard to keep my credit score good and the thought of this ruining all my work was frightening. I quickly got a job and started working as hard as I could to pay this off.

At the time I was earning \$16.00 an hour, after taxes it came out to a little over \$10. I remember doing the calculation and after taking out my cost of living I realized it would take me over a year to pay it off. I then received a call from a close family member who offered me two hundred dollars to receive money from one person and deliver it to another. While ashamed to admit it now, at the time I thought of no reason to believe anything wrong with this request. I agreed to do it and thereby making the worst decision of my life, which I will live with forever.

I was instructed to count the money and make sure it was the same amount as I was told it would be and then bring it to a different place and give it to someone. I did this, and then I was told to do it again, and many more times after that. Eventually I had to quit my job due to mental health issues, but I was able to continue doing this and pay for groceries and clothes. I did this for about a year and a half, and regardless of any contrary notion I may have had at the time, it was my lapse in judgment which led me to that decision and ultimately this place. I assume full responsibility for that. Maybe if I asked more questions I would have made a different decision, but I decided to ignore my better judgment and that is my fault and that of no one else.

While I was doing this, I wondered where the money was coming from and I asked my close family member who told me it was Kosher money. Which, against my better judgment, I accepted at the time even though I knew it had to be illegal, and reasonably foreseeable because of all the secrecy involved.

I did this for just over a year. During which I got married and got a job at an e-commerce business. Until I stopped working with the family members because I shockingly learned that my father had been arrested in relation to a drug conspiracy and wanted no part in that. I continued to just work at the e-commerce business.

Although I knew what I was doing was illegal it was not until after my arrest in July of 2020 that I learned that I was part of a large narcotics conspiracy.

At first, I denied it to myself. I gave myself every excuse as to why it is not my fault, I told myself if I had known I would not have done it. I told myself I was robbed of my innocence and I did nothing wrong. I told myself all I did was bring money from one place to another and that is not drug related. I told myself that growing up it was normal in my community for people to use cash. Along with this I got angry and resentful. I got angry at my parents for not raising me properly. I got angry at my schools for not teaching properly. I got angry at the confidential informant who was working for the government and apparently trying to pull as many people into this as possible. This is why the confidential informant encouraged the monies to go through New York. I am still fully responsible for this case. However, it should still be taken into consideration that the informant was encouraging the crimes to continue to maximize his credit.

Then I got fired from my job due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I now had a lot of time on my hands and I started researching what this crime actually is. I started to learn about money laundering and drug trafficking. I learned about how many countries the drugs pass through and how it kills the economies in each of those countries. I learned how it ruins the life of farmers trying to earn an honest living. I learned how it raises crime rates and hurts so many innocent people.

I sat down and started to realize what I had done. I thought of my old friend A, A was the roommate of a relative of mine. I went to stay with that relative for a week and met A. He was kind and always had a smile on and we quickly became friends. A few months later I found out that A was suffering from mental illness and using cocaine instead of the proper prescribed drugs and one night while extremely intoxicated on drugs he put a shotgun in his mouth and used his toe to pull the trigger.

I then thought about the community members who have been in and out of rehab. I thought about the ones who have overdosed. I thought about the families who were torn apart by drugs and the parents who lost children to addiction. I thought about the children who grew up in broken homes because a parent got addicted to something and had no way of stopping. I started to realize that some of this is my fault. I realized that regardless of how much I wish the facts were different, and regardless of the role I played in this, I made those drugs available for A to take his own life. I was responsible, in part, for my cousin's overdose. As I write this letter of remorse to Your Honor tears are running down my face, not because of what I did to my future and to my family, but because of the future of the families I do not know and because of those who now cannot have a future because of my actions and the decisions I made.

I understand that if your Honor sees fit that I serve a custodial sentence, and that it is the only way for me to repay my debt to society, I fully accept that. I understand that by committing my crimes I took something from others, which I can never repay. I fully accept any sentence Your Honor sees fit.

After crying myself to sleep and not eating for weeks I began to wonder why the court would even let me out on bail. I then remembered the words the pretrial services agent told my wife after interviewing me for bail which were "he's not a danger to society, I'm not even going to suggest an ankle monitor." I then realized that while I may have caused harm to society, this is not where my story ends. I thought possibly, that the court could give me a second chance to prove that I can be a better person and that I can mend the things I have broken.

I reached out to an organization which one of my friends volunteers at called Neshamos. I asked them if I can help volunteer, they said yes, and I dove right in. At first, I was told they help people with mental health issues. I quickly learned that helping the mentally ill was only a small part of what this organization did. As I spent several hours every day there, I understood that they helped a range of people. I began to help children, teens, and adults, who have a host of issues ranging from mental illness to drug addiction. The organization and I help estranged parents cope with their plight, children from broken homes, parents with broken marriages, teens battling addiction.

I started working right below the director and quickly took on more and more responsibility. I am helping him with reorganizing the organization so that we can now take on more projects. We are now working on training teams who answer the helpline. Our helpline is vital because most people who call are just lost and have no one to turn to. The people in need were never taught how to deal with the issues they are encountering and the predicament they find themselves in. While we are not trained professionals, we try to point them in the direction of one. Sometimes we pair them up with others going through the same thing so they can have a support group. We are also working on curriculums for schools and parents. Curriculums to teach teachers how to notice cries for help, to teach parents how to

notice changes in children and when to seek professional assistance. We also go to synagogues with therapists and discuss with adults how things in their relationship can impact their children. We go to schools with therapists to help teachers and students in any way we can. We also organize community events where we help the community grieve the loss of a member. We even have a podcast where we raise common but underdiscussed and often stigmatized issues, like addiction to substances, addiction to gambling, the loss of parents at a young age, spouses of addicts and how it affects them, or warriors who fight mental illness every single day. We do all this, and we are working on many more projects.

I felt this as a good atonement for my misdeeds seeing as my previous actions helped pray on those struggling with addiction and mental illness. I've made it somewhat of my life quest to focus each day on helping those same people overcome their issues. It has been a truly humbling and eye-opening experience.

One day I found a local organization which was looking for volunteers to help buy and deliver groceries to local elderly and sick people who cannot go to the store due to the risk of being exposed to Covid-19. I realized that I can finally help those in a less fortunate situation instead of helping others prey on them. I immediately volunteered and have been shopping for and delivering groceries weekly to those in need.

Along with this I realized that I still have many of my own psychological issues to deal with. I asked for help from my boss at Neshamos in finding a therapist. I found one and have been seeing him twice a week. We are working on resolving issues, which I now realize stem from my childhood, addressing the issues that now haunt me as a result of my case and my future. Most importantly, I asked my therapist how can I go on, knowing what I have done. He helped me understand that what I was feeling was guilt, and anger towards myself. He helped channel that to remorse and regret. He explained that guilt and anger are unhealthy because they make us feel like we can't move forward. Whereas remorse and regret are healthy because they help us move forward.

Your Honor, I write this letter to you as a person who is bound and determined to continue on my path of being a changed man. I have deep remorse and regret for my actions. I understand that what I did was wrong, and I promise to spend the rest of my life repaying society. I ask you today to consider a sentence that would allow me to continue giving back and repaying society instead of being a burden on it.

With Sincere Remorse,

Benzion Zirkind

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